

Can the LGBT Community Be Church Members?

Charisma News recently ran the headline, *Does Brian Houston Allow Gay Members at Hillsong or Not?*

Houston said that all “are welcome to attend, worship and participate as a congregation member with the assurance that they are personally included and accepted within the Hillsong community—but cannot take active leadership roles.”

Although I appreciate Brian’s heart—we must love and help everyone—if we tell people that they can be members and participate in all aspects of church life even while embracing the homosexual lifestyle, we are sending the wrong message. Would we also say that someone who is actively engaging in adultery can become a member, help on the worship team or serve in other areas?

Leaders are held to a higher standard, but so are members. Members of a church share a common faith—a right heart before God should always be sought. There is an enormous difference between someone struggling in sin and someone who embraces it wholeheartedly. There is no wiggle room when it comes to 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. Paul is crystal clear that sin in the camp eventually needs to be dealt with. The purpose of loving confrontation is ultimately restoration, not legalism.

We cannot “affirm” what the Bible clearly calls sin. Those who strongly believe in the Bible and God’s will regarding sexual behavior also strongly believe in unconditional love and forgiveness. To say that authentic Christians hate or fear those trapped in the homosexual lifestyle demonstrates a gross misunderstanding of the Christian faith. To “confront in love” simply comes from a desire to honor God and to truly love and care for others.

Lasting hope and joy are by-products of repentance—turning from sin rather than embracing it. We actually hurt rather than help when we don't convey this truth. In my opinion, a statement more in line with God's heart would be: "All are welcome, but those who continue in unrepentant sin via a lifestyle that opposes God's will cannot participate in leadership or become members."

Jesus perfectly balanced grace and mercy with confrontation and correction. He wanted people to know the truth even if it offended. Oswald Chambers said, "The words of the Lord hurt and offend until there is nothing left to hurt and offend." The Bible was written so that people would know the truth—the truth about God, creation, sin and redemption. In reality, truth invites scrutiny; whereas, error runs from it (cf. 1 John 5:13).

We are not called to make truth tolerable but to make it clear. Follow Jesus' example: preach the difficult truths as well as the joyful ones; preach the cross and the new life; preach hell and preach heaven; preach damnation and preach salvation; preach sin and preach grace; preach wrath and preach love; preach judgment and preach mercy; preach obedience and preach forgiveness; preach that God "is love," but don't forget that God is just. Ironically, it's the love of God that compels us to share all of His truth, including those things that are hard to hear.

We must extend compassion but without compromise. Warning, confronting, challenging, advising and admonishing are all characteristic of genuine love. Parents warn, confront, challenge and admonish daily. Truly misled or self-serving individuals would wrongly attribute these traits to "hate speech."

The Bible is filled with passages about obedience that leads to joy. For example, 1 Peter 1:14 says, "As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your

ignorance.” 1 John 3:3 adds that “all who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure.” And Romans 6:19 tells us to present our “bodies as slaves to righteousness.” Peter asks, “What sort of people ought you to be in holiness and godliness?” (2 Pet. 3:11). Joy and peace are by-products of those who obey.

Thank God for the wonderful work that Hillsong has done over the years, but I pray that they would reconsider their stance and wording. We can be both loving and truthful. How can we warn if we won’t confront, correct if we won’t challenge, and contend if we won’t question? We must speak the truth in love.

Be encouraged: There are consequences for past mistakes, but the answer is to live in God’s forgiveness, rather than to live broken outside of His will.

Watch the sermon, Same-sex Attraction: Balancing Grace & Truth.

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